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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 13, 1933

NAUTICAL WEATHER ORACLES

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In real life the skill of the old sailor or fisherman in predicting the weather is probably never all that it is cracked up to be. Perhaps some day one of these oracles will be subjected to a system of cold-blooded comparisons between predictions and weather, such as are applied to the performances of professional forecasters, and his reputation will be severely damaged thereby. The marvelously weather-wise mariner is a good deal of a myth, but he is none the less splendidly adapted to the uses of novelists. A typical specimen is described in Victor Hugo's "Toilers of the Sea" as follows:

"The sea-captains' table was presided over by an old captain of a large vessel, M. Gertrais-Gaboureau. M. Gertrais-Gaboureau could hardly be regarded as a man; he was rather a living barometer. His long life at sea had given him a surprising power of prognosticating the state of the weather. He seemed to issue a decree for the weather tomorrow. He sounded the winds and felt the pulses of the tides. He might be imagined requesting the clouds to show their tongue -- that is to say, their forked lightnings. He was the physician of the wave, the breeze and the squall. The ocean was his patient. He had traveled round the world like a doctor going his rounds, examining every kind of climate in its good and bad condition. He was profoundly versed in the pathology of the seasons. Sometimes he would be heard delivering himself in this fashion: 'The barometer descended in 1796 to three degrees below tempest point.'"

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